

THE CHAMBERS BROTHERS

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They're Willie, George, Lester and Joe--and they are brothers, all right. Brian Keenan, their drummer, is a brother under the skin. Together, they break boundaries of musical and personal style with their easy, robust irreverence. Try to put them into a musical bag and they won't squirm, kick, or fight it like some other groups do. They dissolve it. With themselves...their laughter...their spirit. ("How do you describe your music?" an interviewer asks. "The Chambers Brothers," they answer.)

The time has come for this explosive Columbia group, and boy, do they know it. They shout it...jubilantly, in a half-preaching, half-joking singsong that plays with monotonous over-rhyme

in the manner of Dylan. In performance they spill out the best uncontained explosion of gospel, rock and blues anyone's heard in a long time. And on record they manage to capture all the electricity---and "togetherness"---of their in-person appearances. Their two Columbia albums, "The Time Has Come" and "A New Time--A New Day," and their single, "Time Has Come Today," have been tremendous successes, each skyrocketing up the national best-seller charts.

That's where they're at and that's what they're doing. Spontaneous, free-wheeling as their small-town Mississippi childhoods ("We would all sit around the fireplace and sing all sorts of songs...tell jokes and eat peanuts," Willie reminisces), yet as conscious and quietly barbed as their musical peers (of the police and the delegates to the Democratic convention, Joe remarks, "People like that, they don't represent me at all.")

Raucous laughter when it does the most good--to clear stale air and relax uptight minds. But, at the perfect moment, supercharged, supersoul understatement.

They send out vibes to their audiences that rival Telstar for strength. At a recent theater-in-the-round concert in New York City, the brothers wailed right through and the audience picked up on it like free soda. They have a way with audiences, those brothers do. And, to them, it's a two-way pipeline. "People are more free to jump up and express themselves now," Lester says. "That really makes the difference in the whole thing."

They dig Richie Havens, Dylan, The Cream, Simon and Garfunkel "...and people who really have something to say," says Joe. They teamed up with--of all things--the polished New York Pro Musica last Easter in a mixed-bag, mixed-media happening at the Electric Circus. They liked the blending of medieval madrigal and blues-rock that came about, and "...we learned so much from doing that stuff," says Joe. But as far as real musical influence goes, they're pretty much their own men. "We're mostly too busy in our own thing to listen to anyone else," says Lester.

And no wonder. They live where they jam and they jam where they write. It's all done in a big house in Stamford, Connecticut, where, among "trees and rabbits and woodchucks and chipmunks and birds...", they get into their own fraternal thing.

They neither read nor write musical notation. They compose their own system: jam-style spontaneity. And they write songs the way they give interviews: as brothers, together, one picking up an idea where another leaves off. "Sometimes one song becomes everybody's song," says Willie. "Yeah...we sit down and we start throwing lines out at each other," Joe continues. "Everybody writes about the same amount. It's an equal thing," adds Lester, in summary.

How do they manage such an almost unparalleled closeness among brothers? "It's easy. Everyone's doing our fighting for us," smiles Joe. That's true: Agents, managers, record producers iron out the hassles ahead of time, leaving the brothers free--well, almost free--to make their joyous music.

Who's the leader? "All of us."

How do you get along? "We're all very happy together."

What message do you try to give your audiences? "Love, peace, and happiness."

...and brotherhood.